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ABSTRACT

University freshman journalism students from two different states were surveyed to study the influence of high school publication experience on journalism career aspirations, perceptions of media credibility, and use of media. About half the students surveyed had worked on high school publications. These former staffers were compared with the students who had not worked on scholastic publications. The findings indicated that former staffers most enjoyed writing on a high school publication, though layout was a close second, and that staffers were more likely to be interested in magazine and newspaper work, while nonstaffers were more interested in advertising careers. The findings also showed that staffers decided much earlier to go into the communications field, with most deciding during high school, while very few nonstaffers made the decision before reaching college. Staffers and nonstaffers perceived media credibility differently, but the results were only statistically significant for one of the states. The media use results indicated that former publications staffers used more media--read more newspapers and news magazines, and watched more television news--than did nonstaffers. (HTH)

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Secondary Education Division

CAREER CHOICE, MEDIA USE AND MEDIA CREDIBILITY: A STUDY OF THE NEWSWRITING STUDENTS AT TWO STATE UNIVERSITIES

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CAREER CHOICE, MEDIA USE AND MEDIA CREDIBILITY:
A STUDY OF THE NEWSWRITING STUDENTS AT TWO STATE UNIVERSITIES

How important is experience on a high school publication in helping young people decide to pursue a journalism career? How does that experience affect their perceptions of media credibility? Do former publications staffers tend to be heavier users of the media than other college journalism majors?

High school publication advisers see a variety of goals for the publications experience in their students' lives. An important goal is to create astute media consumers. Another goal is to provide career exploration for students. Not all students with scholastic publication experience will choose a communication career, but the experience provides a sample of a career path for some of them.

Producing media helps many students to develop a larger interest in media. In suggesting that students be aware of current events, advisers also subtly suggest students use more media. Former staffers' impressions of media careers is partly formed through the high school experience. In addition, their perception of media credibility may be affected by their experiences as news gatherers, writers and editors.

The impressions about journalism provided during the precollege years are important, two researchers assert.[1] Kimball and Lubell concluded:

> Such impressions unquestionably influence the supply and calibre of talent going into journalism later on. It is easier to cultivate a favorable 'image' of journalism at the outset than to change attitudes already crystalized.

Previous studies addressing career choice, media use and media credibility were examined to ascertain common findings. These studies indicate that scholastic journalism has an effect on career choice. Previous studies have not addressed the question of the effect of scholastic journalism on media use or on media credibility.

This paper will describe the students enrolled in the basic newswriting classes at two major universities, finding them similar on many demographic variables. About half of the students at each school had worked on high school publications. This group of former staffers was compared with students who had not worked on scholastic publications, here termed nonstaffers. The two groups were compared for their interest in different media careers, their rating of media credibility, and their use of media. The final section of the paper provides a detailed analysis of the media use by newswriting students at the two schools.

Previous Studies

The high school publication adviser was the single most important source of information about careers in journalism, according to Weigle.[2] Also important were reading print media and talking to family and friends. All of the students he surveyed had high school publication experience. A "desire to write" led many students to enter high school journalism programs, but only 3 percent were interested in majoring in journalism in college and only 10 percent in entering journalism after college graduation.

Twenty-nine percent of publications staff members said they expected to enter a career in journalism and 10 percent said they were undecided, according to Lubell's study at the 1958 CSPA meeting.[3]

The major reason for choosing a journalism career was "I like to write." More than a quarter of the students indicated an interest in working on newspapers. About a fifth said they would like freelancing and a fifth said magazines. At the time of the study, fewer than half of the homes in America had television, and mass circulation magazines such as Life and Look were highly successful.

Kimball and Lubell added to Lubell's study with surveys of high school publication students in three other states.[4] Twenty-one percent said they planned a career in journalism and 10 percent were considering it. Among those on high school staffs, journalism was the first career choice of males, ahead of engineering, law and business, and the second choice of females, following teaching. The most common reason for choosing a media career was "I like to write." Although 55 percent of the males and 50 percent of the females were interested in newspaper jobs, few women were interested in broadcasting, advertising or public relations. Broadcasting and magazines were of almost equal interest to men.

Rice asked journalism graduates from five midwestern universities what factors were the most important in their career choice.[5] The student's ability,interest in and success with the English language was most often cited. Other valuable factors included participation in secondary school publications, enrollment in high school journalism classes, and the role of the high school teacher-adviser. He suggested that female students needed career information on journalism in junior high rather than in high school because they made career decisions earlier than males.

More than 80 percent of college freshmen majoring in journalism first became interested during high school, according to Cranford.[6]

In fact, 36 percent of the males and 43 percent of the females had decided before their senior year of high school. He also said that these students related their career decision to a liking of their high school publication experience. High school newspaper experience influenced about a third of the students and teacher encouragement influenced about a fourth of them toward media careers.

Although in the early 1960s journalism faculties were concerned with attracting students, by the 1970s enrollments soared. The primary reason for choosing a journalism major was the desire to write, according to Bowers.[7] Among college journalism majors, women rated two influences on their choice of major significantly higher than men did: their high school publication experience and their high school advisers. Although 55 percent of the students wanted a newspaper reporting or editing job after graduation, only 30 percent said they would be interested in newspaper jobs five years after graduation.

Larger enrollments have also aroused concern about the quality of students. Fedler and Taylor found no significant difference in the academic test scores of journalism majors, speech majors and other students.[8] Journalism majors spent about the same amount of time with the print media as other students.

The patterns of media use by college students and their perceptions of media credibility have also interested several researchers. Schramm found in 1945 that college students averaged 53 minutes daily with radio, 19 minutes with newspapers, and 13 minutes with magazines.[9] The average student spent 15 hours a week in class and almost as long with media. Schramm also found that 41 percent of the students read two daily papers,

The students ranked radio more reliable as a source of news than newspapers (radio 58 percent, newspapers 35 percent). A similar response came from Iowa City high school students: 50 percent favored radio, 40 percent newspapers.

Schramm's study came near the end of World War II and before the introduction of television, however. A 1959 study of college student media use found that 79 percent regularly read a daily newspaper, spending 15 to 30 minutes.[10] Forty-three percent said they read magazines regularly, and 31 percent read newsmagazines regularly. Thirty-seven percent of the students said they listened to radio for more than an hour daily, and 20 percent watched television news regularly.

In 1959, television was in a minority of American homes. Cushing and Lemert found in 1973 that less than half of college students watched any television news "yesterday."[11] Two-thirds of the students regularly read the local newspaper and half regularly read newsmagazines. These students considered television the most credible medium. Their rankings were: television (42 percent), magazines (30 percent), newspapers (21 percent), and radio (7 percent).

In asking students to rank the media for credibility, Baxter and Bittner added a new category: other people.[12] They asked both University of Oregon students and junior-senior high school students in Portland to choose the most credible medium. The rankings by the two groups were identical. Television ranked highest with 39 percent; then came magazines (22 percent), newspapers (18 percent), other people (13 percent) and radio (8 percent).

Thus, the previous studies seem to suggest that students who participate in scholastic journalism in high school are likelier to decide to go into the communication field at an earlier age and that advisers have important influence on students in making this decision. These studies did not examine the media use of former publications staffers or their perceptions of media credibility. The previous studies suggest that college students as a whole have shifted in their judgment of the most credible medium. In addition, their use of media shifted slightly as television became more prevalent. Several unexamined questions will be explored in this paper: Do those with high school journalism experience place more trust in print media? Do former staffers develop a greater "media habit" than other journalism majors?

The Study

For several years, newswriting instructors at Indiana University have given a questionnaire to students at the beginning of the semester. This instrument, refined with each semester's use, was intended to help individual instructors derive some information about their students. It was also used to trace a picture of the students coming into the journalism program.

In the fall of 1980, the instructor of the parallel course at the University of Alabama gave the same questionnaire to his students. Most of the survey questions were identical, but a few were tailored to fit the differences between the two schools.

The students enrolled in the first newswriting course at these two state institutions were the population for the study. Every student enrolled in the fall 1980 semester received a questionnaire in the first month of the semester.

Several questions directly addressed the effect of high school journalism experience on the college communication major. Students without high school publication experience skipped those questions. In addition, students reported their use of media and their ranking of job interests. The questionnaire also asked when students first decided to pursue a career in communication and their source of information about those careers. Finally, they indicated which medium they considered most credible.

The research questions addressed were:

1. What did former staffers enjoy most about high school publications?

2. Do former staffers make different career choices than those who were not staffers?

3. Did former staffers decide at a younger age to enter the communication field?

4. Do former staffers have a different perception of media credibility than other communication majors?

5. What was the most important source of information about communication careers for both staffers and nonstaffers?

6. Do former staffers tend to read more newspapers and magazines and attend to more broadcast news media than those who were not staffers?

The purpose of the study was not to compare Indiana students with Alabama students, nor to compare the two university programs. The researchers sought to profile the students enrolled in the courses; to see whether students with high school journalism experience differed from other students; and to determine how much students use media.

Profile of the Student Population

Before discussing the impact of high school publications on the young newswriting students, we would like briefly to describe the student population enrolled in the course at each school.

Indiana University. The Writing for Mass Media class (J200) at Indiana University is the second in the sequence of required courses; the first is a survey of American journalism history. In the fall 1980 semester, 110 students enrolled; 49.1 percent were sophomores, 35.5 percent were juniors and 6.4 percent were freshmen. Almost half of the students were 19 years old, and a fifth of them were 20. The enrollment was predominantly female: 63.3 percent women, 36.7 percent men.

An English composition class is a J200 prerequisite. Almost all students, 98.1 percent, had completed the course. The other students were currently enrolled in it.

The majority of J200 students, 87.3 percent, were declared journalism majors, and 7.3 percent were journalism minors. Other majors accounted for 5.5 percent. However, majors did not necessarily intend to enter the media after graduation. More than half, 59.3 percent, said they intended to have a career in communication, while 25 percent said they were exploring careers.

Students indicated most interest in a job on magazines. Other areas, in order of decreasing interest, were newspapers, broadcasting, public relations, advertising, photography, communication research and teaching.

The first career choice, divided by sex, shows some interesting differences. Females rated advertising first, followed by magazines, public relations, newspapers, broadcasting, photography, teaching and

research. Males ranked newspapers most often as their first choice, fo lowed by photography, magazines, broadcasting, advertising, public relations, teaching and communication research. Because the low ranking of advertising by males tended to pull down its high ranking by women, magazines emerged as the first choice on the overall Indiana group.

Indiana high schools have strong publications programs, and more than half (56.5 percent) of the students worked in them. About a third of the J200 students worked on a newspaper, an eighth on a yearbook, and an eighth worked on both publications. Former staffers worked in highly responsible positions: more than half were either the editor of the publication or a section editor. Almost two-thirds of the staffers received academic credit for the publications experience.

University of Alabama. The University of Alabama has three tracks within the School of Communications: journalism, advertising and public relations, and broadcast and film communication. All communication majors must enroll in Basic Communication Skills (MC102), which follows a required media survey course. In the fall 1980 semester, 229 students enrolled; 50.7 percent were sophomores, 37.1 percent were juniors, and 5.7 percent were freshmen. Almost half the students were 19 years old, and about a fourth of them were 20. Females accounted for 62 percent of the enrollment and males for 38 percent.

MC102 has a prerequisite English composition course, which 94.6 percent of the students had completed.

The majority of students, 57 percent, were advertising and public relations majors. About a third, 30 percent, were broadcast and film majors, and 10 percent were journalism majors. The remainder were non-

majors. However, communication majors did not necessarily intend to enter the media after graduation. Two-thirds said they intended to, while 18 percent said they were exploring careers.

Students indicated most interest in a job in advertising. Other areas, in order of decreasing interest, were broadcasting, public relations, photography, magazines, newspapers, research and teaching.

Females selected public relations as a strong first choice and advertising as their second, followed by broadcasting, photography, magazines, newspapers, teaching and research. For their first choice, males chose broadcasting, followed by advertising, public relations, newspapers, magazines, photography, teaching and research. As in the Indiana sample, the first choices of the males and females cancelled each other out, leaving the second choice of each group as the overall first choice.

Almost half of all the Alabama students worked on a high school publication. The greatest number, 18.4 percent, worked on a yearbook. Almost an equal number, 15.7 percent, worked on a newspaper, and 6.9 percent said they worked on both publications. In addition, 4.2 percent worked on a literary magazine. Many of the Alabama staffers worked in responsible positions: more than half (51 percent) were either the editor or section editor of the publication. Almost two-thirds (59.8 percent) of those who worked on scholastic publications received academic credit.

The difference in student career interest can be partially explained by the different structure of the two schools. At Indiana, broadcast news courses are taught in the School of Journalism, film courses in

comparative literature, and other broadcast courses in the telecommunications department. Also, Indiana has only two FTE faculty members teaching in advertising and public relations, while Alabama has nine persons teaching in that area.

Findings

Former staffers said they most enjoyed writing on a high school publication, though layout was a close second. At Indiana, 54.9 percent of the students most enjoyed writing or layout; at Alabama, 59.8 percent did. Photography and interviewing were the third and fourth choices in both states. Editing, reporting and business garnered fewer than 9 percent of the mentions.

Former staffer and nonstaffer interest in various media careers were compared using t-tests. Nonstaffers were more interested in advertising ($p=.024$). Staffers were more likely to be interested in magazines ($p=.021$) and newspapers ($p=.057$).

Staffers also decided much earlier "to go into communication" ($p=.000$). Table I compares the point at which staffers and nonstaffers decided to enter communications. In Alabama, 50 percent of the staffers decided during high school--30.2 percent before the 12th grade. In contrast, 36.4 percent of the nonstaffers decided during high school, and only 15.2 percent before their senior year. In Indiana, 73.8 percent of the staffers decided to go into communication while in high shcool, and 57.4 percent decided before the 12th grade. Very few nonstaffers made the decision before reaching college; only 27.7 percent decided during high school, and only 12.8 percent before their senior year.

TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Staffers and nonstaffers perceive media credibility differently, though the differences are statistically significant only with the Alabama students. (See Table II.) All Alabama students rated television the most credible (65.6 percent), followed by newspapers (18.6 percent), magazines (10.2 percent), radio (4.2 percent) and other people (1.4 percent). But nonstaffers were more likely to rate television or radio most credible, while staffers chose newspapers or magazines. (X^2=13.88, 4 df, p=.0077)

Indiana students rated television a weak first in credibility (40.2 percent), followed closely by newspapers with 35.5 percent. Magazines were third with 20.6 percent, and radio had 3.7 percent. Nonstaffers chose newspapers first, 42.6 percent, and television second with 31.9 percent.

Staffers were more likely to learn about media careers from a high school adviser than were nonstaffers, as could be expected. (See Table III.) In Alabama, 10.4 percent of the staffers said their adviser was the most important source of their impression; in Indiana, 11.9 percent of the staffers credited advisers most.

TABLE II ABOUT HERE

In Alabama, the four most important sources of career information for all students were radio and television, 32.6 percent; media professionals, 23.7 percent; family and friends, 21.4 percent; and newspapers and magazines, 12.6 percent. Nonstaffers mentioned two categories--radio and television, and family and friends--more often than staffers did.

In Indiana, the four most important sources of career information

for all students were newspapers and magazines, 32.1 percent, tied with media professionals; radio and television, 13.2 percent; and family and friends, 10.4 percent. Nonstaffers were more likely to mention newspapers and magazines than staffers were. Other sources of information had similar importance to staffers and nonstaffers.

TABLE III ABOUT HERE

Media Use of College Students

Former publications staffers were more likely to use more media--to read more newspapers and newsmagazines and to watch television news--than nonstaffers were ($p=.047$). Students were asked about their readership of four newspapers and three newsmagazines and their attention to broadcast news. They also estimated the time they spent reading newspapers, listening to radio and watching television. The results are presented below.

Newspaper Reading Habits. The newspaper that students were most likely to read was the campus daily. At Alabama, 88.1 percent of the students and at Indiana 92.7 percent said they read it two or more times a week. The local newspaper was the second most common choice, though fewer than half of the students on either campus said they read it regularly. (Alabama 41.2 percent, Indiana 31.8 percent)

Almost an equal number of students said they regularly read a metropolitan newspaper. Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is about 55 miles away from Birmingham, and 26 percent of the Alabama students said they regularly read the Birmingham Post-Herald, and 35.7 percent said they

read the Birmingham News regularly. Bloomington, Indiana, is about 50 miles from Indianapolis and 100 miles from Louisville. The Indianapolis Star or News was regular reading for 32.7 percent of the students, while the Louisville Courier-Journal was regular reading for 38.2 percent.

Indiana students spent more time, on the average, reading the newspaper than Alabama students. Those spending 20 minutes or more daily comprised 64.5 percent at Indiana and 32.2 percent at Alabama. "Average" newspaper reading time was from 20 to 29 minutes at Indiana and from 10 to 19 minutes at Alabama. Alabama males were likely to spend more time reading the newspaper than females were (p=.0169).

Magazine Reading Habits. The most read newsmagazine was Newsweek. Almost half of the Indiana students (48.2 percent) and more than a third of the Alabama students (35.5 percent) said they read it "regularly" (twice a month or more). Running a close second was Time magazine, which was only a few percentage points behind at each school. (Indiana 45.5 percent, Alabama 34.8 percent) Trailing in third place was U.S. News, which had about 12 percent of the students at each school.

Broadcast Media Habits. Alabama students were heavier users of electronic media than Indiana students. Alabama students listened to significantly more radio (p=.000), one to two hours or more daily, while Indiana students reported an hour or less daily. Alabama students were also significantly more likely to have watched a network newscast "last night." (Alabama 52.7 percent, Indiana 40.9 percent, p=.056) About two-fifths of each group watched a local newscast "last night." And Alabama students were highly likely to spend more time watching television daily (p=.000). The Alabama students watched from one to two hours

daily, while the Indiana students watched an hour or less.

About two-thirds of each group of students said they generally watched "60 Minutes," and about a third of each group said they generally watched "Lou Grant."

Discussion. Alabama students indicated less interest in newspaper careers than Indiana students, which may help explain why they spend less time reading newspapers. Because they indicated more interest in broadcasting careers, they may use more broadcast media.

By combining student time spent with the various media, we estimate that the average student spends from a low of 10 hours to a high of 30 hours weekly with the media. If a conservative average is 15 hours a week, that means that students are spending as much time with these three media (excluding magazines or movies) as they do in class. This likelihood reminds us of what Wilbur Schramm said in 1945:[13]

> The challenge to teachers is to be as alive in this world of mass communication as the students are--to connect this radio-press-movie part of college with the classroom-library part so that one will illuminate the other, and both will contribute to the integrated growth of the student.

Conclusion

Although "liking to write" was cited as the area most enjoyed by former high school publication staffers, an almost equal favorite was layout. Publications advisers should be aware of this phenomenon as they recruit and train students. College faculty should also recognize that while liking to write helps attract some young majors, an enjoyment of layout is also a powerful motivator.

Universities that desire to recruit the top quality students into their journalism or communication program can focus their efforts on

the students who are editors and section editors of their publications. These students are likely to be interested in a journalism career, a decision in which their high school adviser has had an influential role. They are more likely to be interested in careers in newspapers or magazines than other students.

The recruiting effort should not be narrowly focused on high school seniors, however; underclassmen and perhaps even junior high students should be told some of the possibilities available in media careers. Universities might take a two-step approach: informing students about careers in the eighth, ninth and tenth grades and then focusing on individuals in responsible positions in their junior and senior years. An important source of career information, advisers should be a key resource for universities to use in providing career and enrollment guidance.

Because college students spend so much time with media--as much as or more than they do in the classroom--both the high school teacher and college instructor have an obligation to help students learn to use media wisely. Students should be encouraged to read daily newspapers and to compare what they read with accounts of the same incident in newsmagazines and on broadcasts. They should continually ask questions about the credibility of the media. In doing so, the students will become both better communicators and more astute media consumers.

TABLE I

"When did you decide to go into communication?"
(Answers by percentage)

Grade	Alabama students		Indiana students	
	Nonstaffer (N=118)	Staffer (N=96)	Nonstaffer (N=47)	Staffer (N=61)
9	1.7%	10.4%	6.4%	24.6%
10	4.2	8.3	2.1	18.0
11	9.3	11.5	4.3	14.8
12	21.2	19.8	14.9	16.4
in college	59.3	47.9	66.0	23.0
haven't decided	4.2	2.1	6.4	3.3
	X^2=10.95, 5 df, p=.0524		X^2=26.57, 5 df, p=.0001	

TABLE II

"If you heard conflicting reports of the same news story from five sources, which one would you be most inclined to believe?
(Answers by percentage)

Source	Alabama students		Indiana students	
	Nonstaffer (N=119)	Staffer (N=96)	Nonstaffer (N=47)	Staffer (N=60)
television	73.1%	56.3%	31.9%	46.7%
newspaper	12.6	26.0	42.6	30.0
magazine	8.4	12.5	19.1	21.7
radio	5.9	2.1	6.4	1.7
other people	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.0
	X^2=13.88, 4 df, p=.0077		X^2=4.246, 3 df p=.2361	

TABLE III

"What was the most important source of your impressions about communication careers?" (Answers in percentages)

Source	Alabama students		Indiana students	
	Nonstaffer (N=119)	Staffer (N=96)	Nonstaffer (N=47)	Staffer (N=59)
radio & TV	37.8%	26.0%	12.8%	13.6%
family & friends	24.4	17.7	10.6	10.2
media pros	20.2	28.1	31.9	32.2
newspapers & magazines	10.9	14.6	38.3	27.1
H.S. adviser	0.8	10.4	0.0	11.9
movies	4.2	2.1	0.0	1.7
books	1.7	1.0	6.4	3.4
	X^2=15.76, 6 df, p=.0151		X^2=7.91, 6 df, p=.2449	

Footnotes

1. Penn T. Kimball and Samuel Lubell, "High School Students' Attitudes Toward Journalism as a Career: II," Journalism Quarterly 37:413-22 (Summer 1960).

2. Clifford F. Weigle, "Influence of High School Journalism on Choice of Career," Journalism Quarterly 34:39-45 (Winter 1957).

3. Samuel Lubell, "High School Students' Attitudes Toward Journalism as a Career," Journalism Quarterly 36:199-203 (Spring 1959).

4. Kimball and Lubell, op. cit.

5. W. Manion Rice, "A Survey of Determinant Factors in the Choice of Journalism as a Career," Ph.D. Dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1967. Journalism Abstracts 6:42-3 (1968).

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12. Leslie A. Baxter and John R. Bittner, "High School and College Student Perceptions of Media Credibility," Journalism Quarterly 51:517-20 (Autumn 1974).

13. Schramm, op. cit., p. 33.